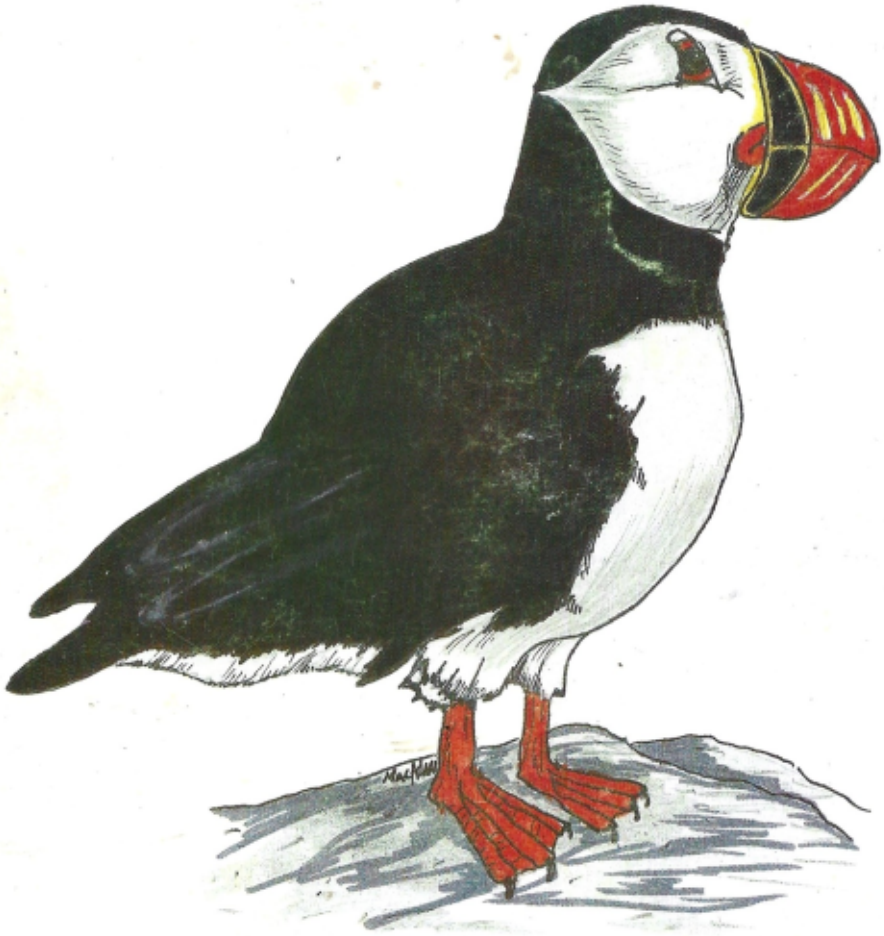
Muffin, The Maine Puffin



by Grace A. Bowers
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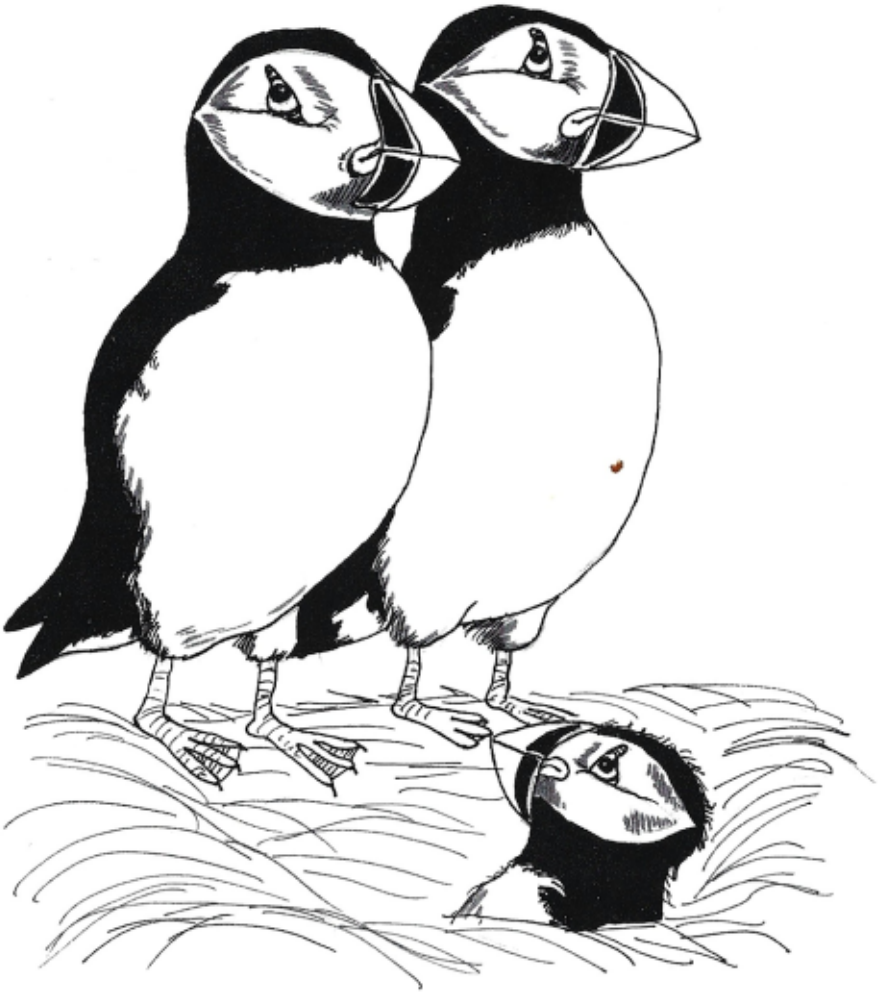
Muffin, The Maine Puffin

Muffin Puffin peeked out over the edge of his nest. He had just broken through the shell of the egg that had been laid many weeks ago.

He did not know where he was. "It sure is a strange-looking place out there," he thought. He blinked his eyes and looked again.

"Oh, my," he said. "WHERE am I? WHO am I? WHAT am I?" Muffin began to feel afraid. He thought he was all alone.

Muffin closed his eyes tight. Then he opened one eye very slowly and looked around. Who was coming? He opened his other eye and slowly turned his head.



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Just above him sat a beautiful bird who said, "I am your mother."

"Mama?" asked Muffin.

"Yes, I am your Mama Puffin."

"What is a puffin?" asked Muffin.

"A puffin is a bird," said Mama Puffin. "You are my very own baby Atlantic puffin. Look, here comes Papa Puffin."

"Papa," cried Muffin, as Papa Puffin flew into the nest. "I know I am a puffin. I know I am a bird. But Papa, I don't know where I am!"

"Why, Muffin," said Papa, "you are in a nest on the coast of Maine. You are a very special bird, you know."

"I AM?" asked Muffin.

"Yes," said Mama, "you are our special son. You are also special and rare in a different way. You belong only to Maine in America and Newfoundland in Canada."

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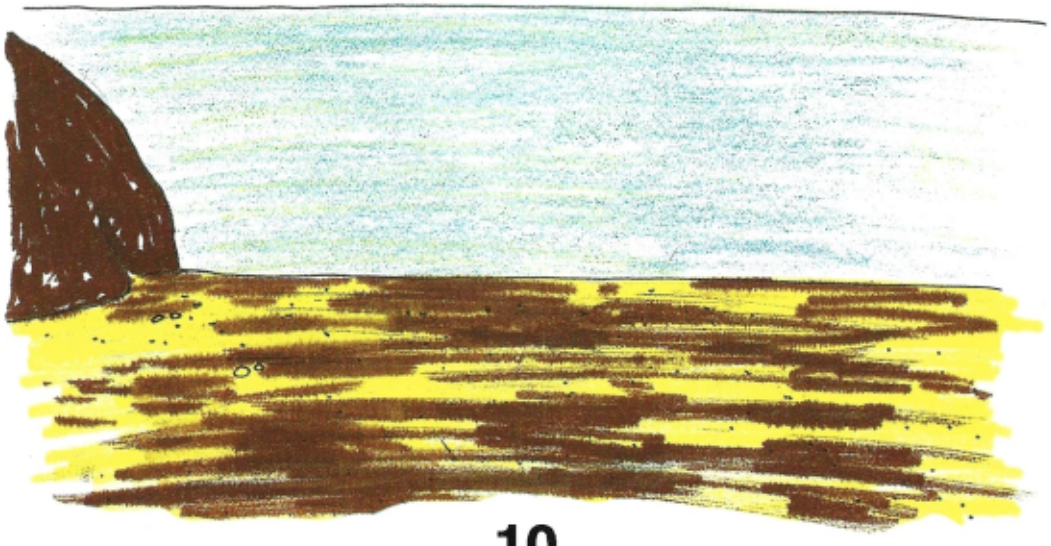
"Oh, boy!" said Muffin. "I AM special. I AM MUFFIN PUFFIN! I AM A RARE BIRD and I LIVE IN MAINE. Now I know WHO I am, WHAT I am and WHERE I am!"

Muffin then settled down for a nap beneath his mother's warm feathers.



Muffin's Hard Fall

"Wake up, Muffin," said Mama Puffin. "Today you must learn how to fly."

"OH BOY, OH BOY, OH BOY!" yelled Muffin. He had been waiting for this day a long time.

"Not so fast, Muffin," said Mama. "First I will tell you what to do. Then Papa will show you how to do it."

Muffin was so excited he couldn't wait. He jumped onto the edge of the nest and took a big leap! Poor Muffin! He fell KER-PLOPP! right down on the sand.

It was not soft sand—it was not medium sand—IT WAS HARD SAND!

"OH DEAR, OH DEAR!" thought Muffin. "I HURT! I hurt ALL OVER! My tummy hurts, my head hurts, my legs hurt—I REALLY hurt ALL OVER!"

Mama and Papa Puffin flew down to the sand where Muffin lay.

"Muffin," Mama said, "are you all right?"

"NO!" yelled Muffin. "I am NOT all right. I HURT all over!"

Mama felt his legs. She felt his head. Then she felt the rest of him.

"You are O.K. all over, Muffin," she said. "But, Muffin, you have a very hard job to do. I cannot carry you. You must walk all the way up the cliff to the nest. Do you think you can do that?"

Muffin looked up. Oh, my! That cliff was a LONG LONG way up! "OH, Mama, I cannot do it."

"You have to," said Mama. "It will be hard but, Muffin, you have to do it. Just believe: I can do it—I can do it—I CAN DO IT!"

Poor Muffin! He HAD to climb up the cliff if he wanted to go home—and he DID want to go home. He began the long hard walk up the cliff. Step by step he climbed. Mama and Papa Puffin walked beside him.

"I can't do it," Muffin cried.

"Yes, you can," said Papa. All the way up Papa and Mama Puffin talked to Muffin. At last—at last! they reached the burrow.

"Oh," sighed Muffin, "I'm home."

Papa Puffin said in a serious tone, "Now, tell me, Muffin, what did you learn today?"

"I learned not to go flying by myself?"

"No," said Papa.

"I learned not to land Kerplopp?"

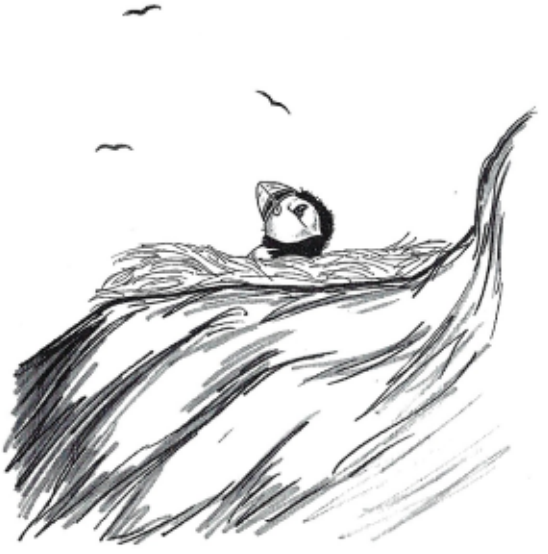
"No," said Papa.

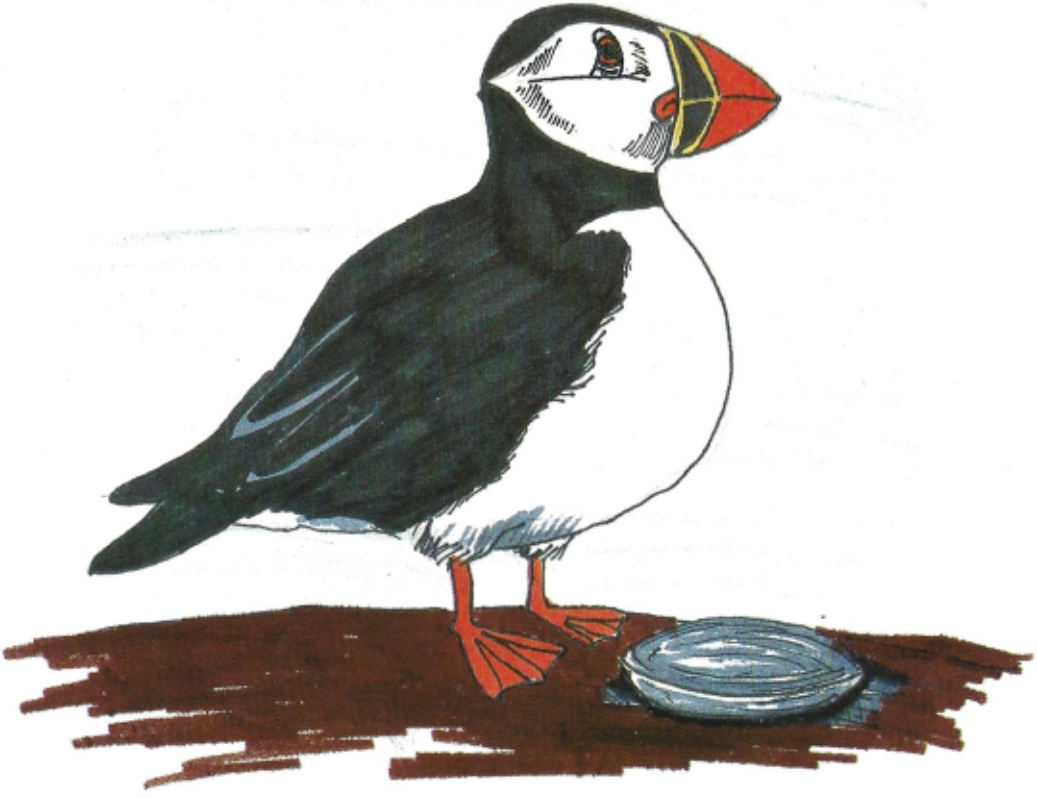
Muffin thought hard. "What did I learn?"

Then he said, "I learned I should listen to Mama!"

"That's right," said Papa.

"Boy, am I glad I'm home!" thought Muffin. "I'm glad I DID get back to the nest. And I WILL listen to Mama from now on!"





Muffin Learns To Eat

Muffin sat on the edge of the cliff and looked around. Down, way, way down, he could see some clams.

"Oh, boy," he thought, "DINNER! But how am I going to get them? Mama hasn't shown me how to open shells."

Mama and Papa Puffin weren't near the nest, so Muffin couldn't ask them. "Well, I guess I'll just try it all by myself!" he thought. "I DO know how to fly now."

Muffin flew down to the beach. He picked up a clam with his big bill.

"Now what do I do?" he asked himself. "I'm very hungry. I have dinner in my mouth, but I can't eat it! Oh dear, oh dear!"

A big wave rolled in from the ocean and uncovered more clams. "Here I am all alone and so hungry, but I can't open the clams!" he cried.

He looked up and there were Grandma and Grandpa Puffin. "What are you doing, Muffin?" Grandpa asked.

"I am very hungry," said Muffin, "but I can't open the clamshells."

"Let me show you how," said Grandpa. "Puffins must learn how to feed themselves, you know."

Grandpa took the clam in his powerful beak. He showed Muffin how to crack it open and get the tasty clam out.

Muffin, Grandma and Grandpa ate a delicious dinner of juicy clams. When they were full, Muffin said, "Now I know two things. I know how to fly. And I know how to open clams to get my dinner. Maybe tomorrow I'll know three things!"

Muffin could hardly wait for Mama and Papa Puffin to get home. He was anxious to tell them all that he had learned.

Just then he saw them coming. They had brought dinner for him. "Surprise," Muffin said, "I've ALREADY eaten because Grandpa and Grandma Puffin showed me how!"

Papa and Mama Puffin said, "We're so proud of you!"

Muffin yawned a BIG yawn.

"Time for bed, son," said Mama. She settled her warm feathers over Muffin.

"I love you and Papa," murmured Muffin as he cuddled down.

He was sound asleep before Mama Puffin could answer, "We love you, too, Muffin."

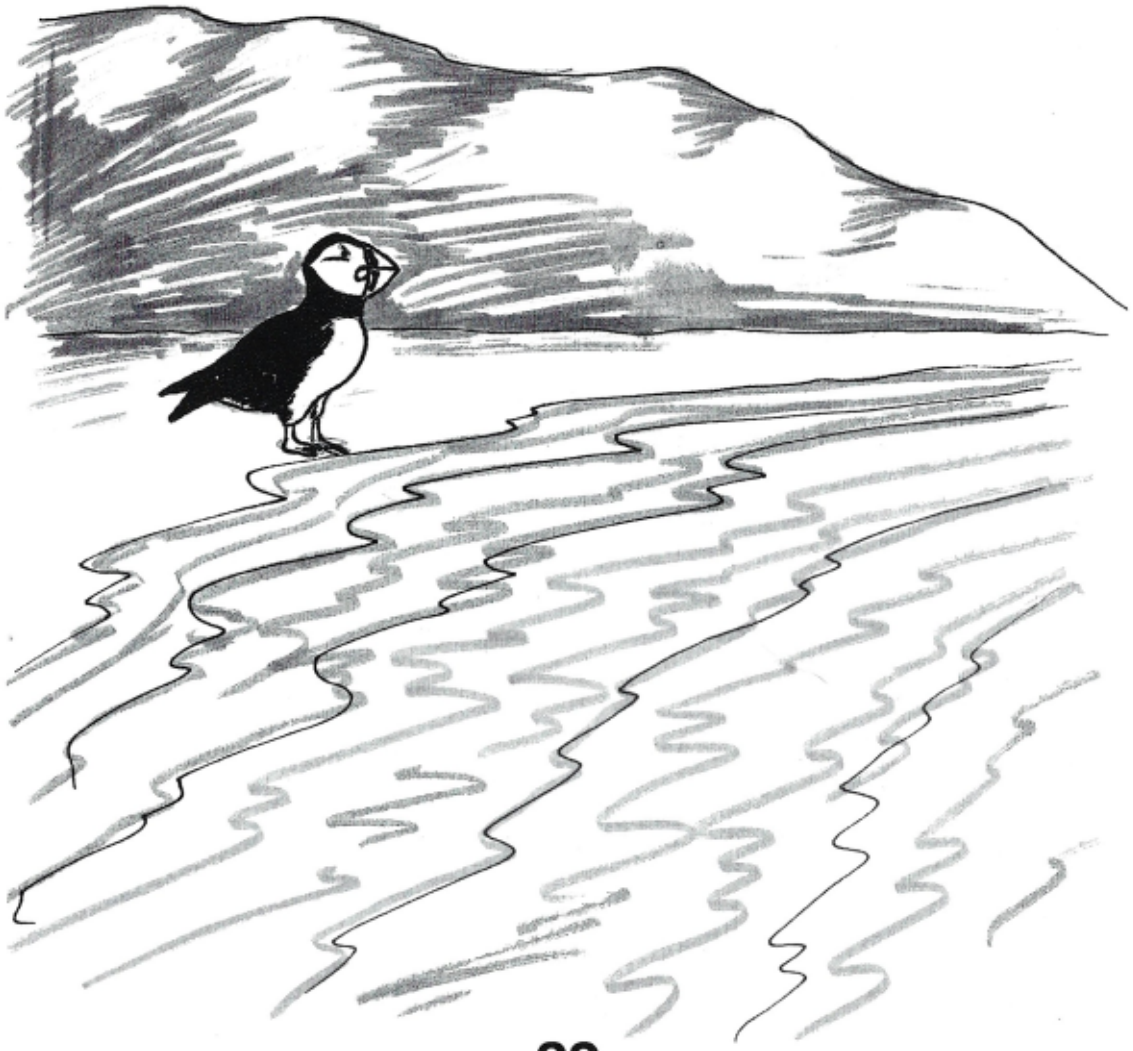
Muffin's First Bath

"Today, Muffin," Mama Puffin said, "you'll learn how to take your own bath in the Atlantic Ocean. It's important for ALL puffins to keep clean—to keep their feathers in the finest shape."

"I can do it! I can do it!" chanted Muffin. He jumped up and down on his bright orange feet.

"What fun this will be," he thought. "I'll take my very own bath all by myself. I'll make Mama and Papa proud of my feathers."

Muffin waddled to the edge of the ocean and jumped in. He became busy right away. He washed each feather very carefully.



The waves floated him along, further and further from shore. Soon Muffin could not see the shore at all.

"What should I do?" Muffin thought. He looked around fearfully. There was Papa Puffin.

"Papa, I thought I was lost!" Muffin cried.

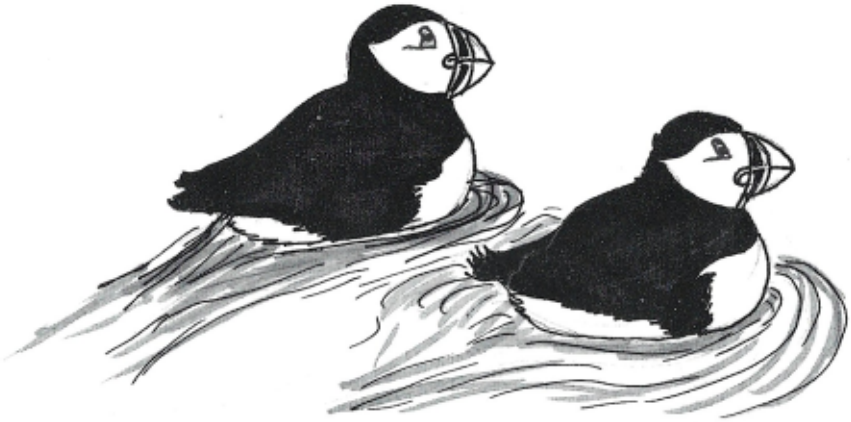
"You were so busy getting clean that you floated away, Muffin," said Papa softly. "I have been behind you all the way. You don't need to be frightened. I won't let you get lost. You are my special son."

Muffin felt very safe and secure.

"Now," said Papa, "you will learn how to swim so you won't float away again. First, you kick your feet."

Muffin began to kick both feet. "Yuk!" he sputtered as he swallowed a big gulp of sea water.

"No, Muffin," said Papa, "don't kick both feet at once. Kick one at a time. Try it now—first your right foot, then your left foot."



Muffin tried hard. Right foot—left foot. Right foot—left foot. He was swimming! All by himself! "Oh, boy, Papa!" he yelled, "I can swim!"

"Good boy," said Papa. "Now come back to the nest with me and see Mama."

Mama Puffin seemed glad to see Muffin. She scolded him a little for nearly getting lost, but then told him, "Muffin, we're proud of you. You cleaned your feathers so well, and you learned how to swim. A clean puffin is a healthy puffin. That's why we clean our feathers every day."

Muffin was happy. He had learned two more things AND he had made Mama and Papa proud of him!

Muffin Meets A Friend

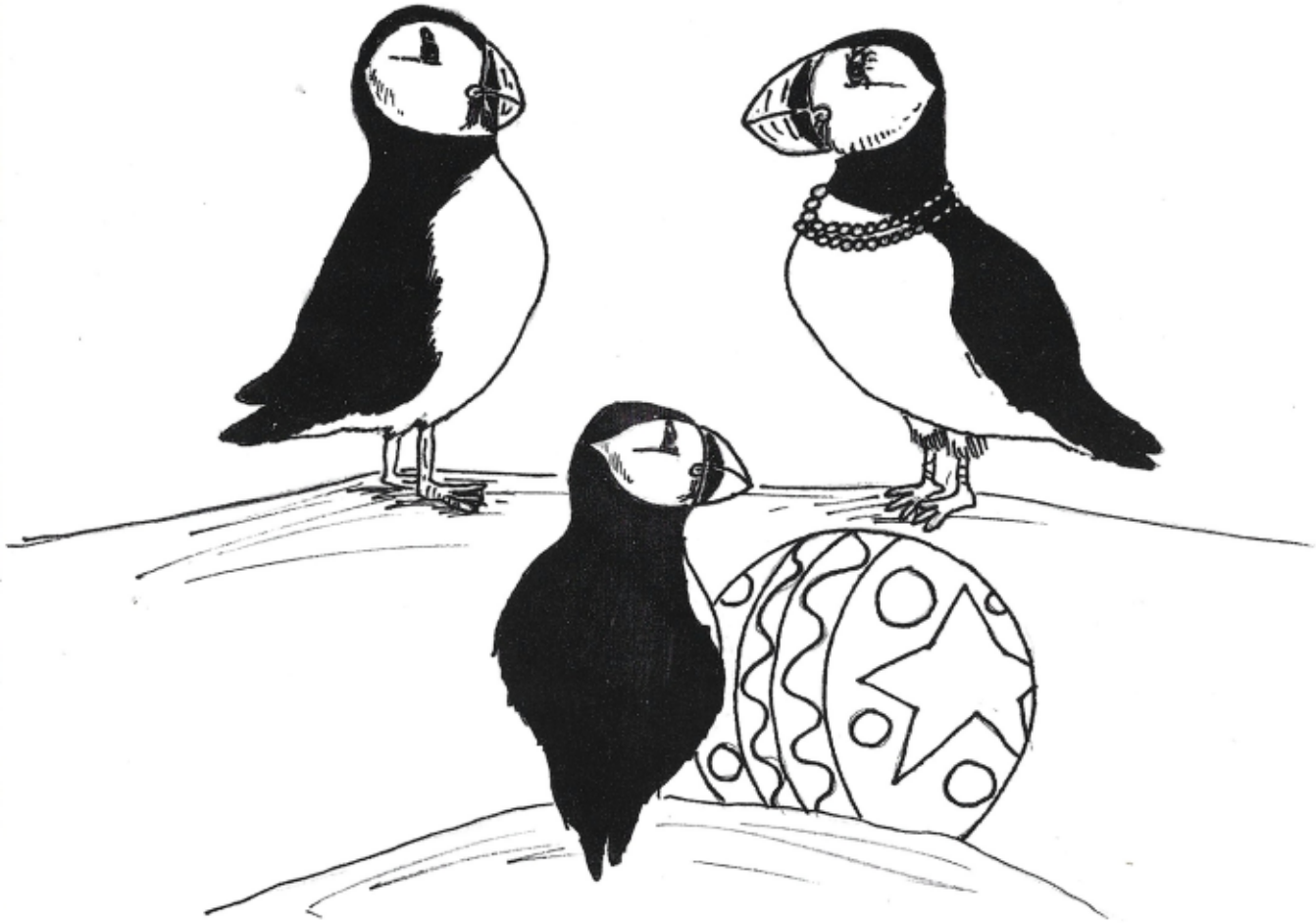
The sun peeked over the hill. Muffin stretched his feathers and slowly opened his eyes.

It was going to be a beautiful day. Muffin could feel it. Something good was going to happen!

Mama Puffin fed him his breakfast of tasty fish. As Muffin ate, Mama said, "I am going to visit a friend today, Muffin. Would you like to go with me?"

"What is a friend?" asked Muffin. This was a new word for him.

"A friend," Mama said, "is someone to talk to. A friend is someone to play with. A friend is someone to share with."



Muffin thought, "I have only had Mama and Papa and Grandma and Grandpa to do these things with. I would like to have someone else to talk to and play with and share with."

"O.K." yelled Muffin. "Let's go to see our friends."

Mama and Muffin flew to a nest a long way off. As they were in the air, Muffin was thinking. "What if I don't like him—or maybe it's a HER! What if my new friend is a GIRL!"

Soon they came to a nest high on a cliff on the other side of Seal Island. "Here we are," said Mama.

Muffin looked. There were two baby puffins. They looked just like him!

"Mama," Muffin asked, "why are there two baby puffins?"

Mama answered, "Sometimes Mama puffins lay two eggs instead of one. Then they have two babies."

"Mama," said Muffin in a very soft voice, "are two babies better than one?"

"Oh, no, Muffin," said Mama. "A mother loves one baby just as much as two. And a mother that has two babies loves each one as much as the other. Now let's go meet your new friends."

Mama and Muffin flew low over the nest. Mama's friend said, "Welcome."

Mama said, "Muffin, this is my friend Lily and these are her children, Paul and Paula."

Muffin stayed behind Mama and peeked around her. He didn't know what to say or how to act.

Mama and Mrs. Lily Puffin began to talk. Muffin, Paul and Paula looked at each other.

"Muffin," said Paul, "would you like to play?"

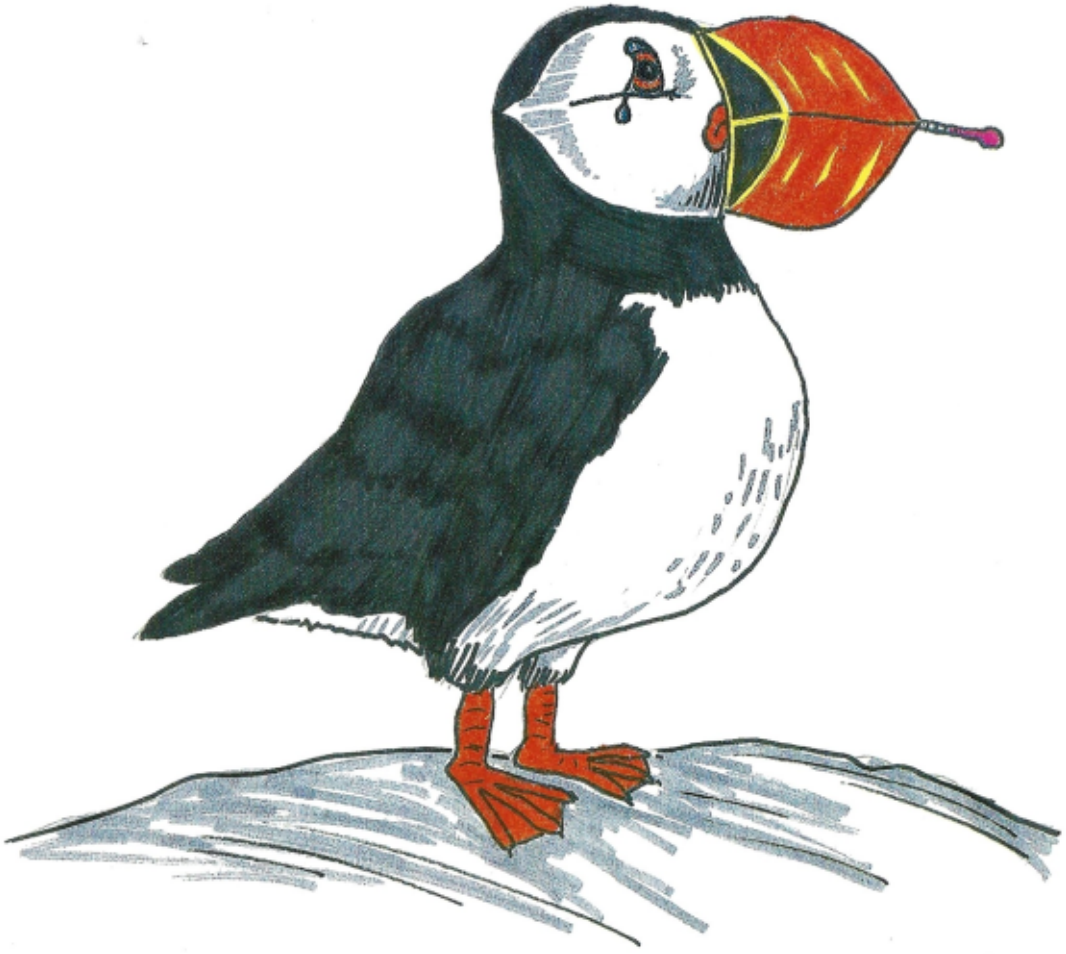
Muffin walked very slowly around Mama Puffin and said, "Maybe."

Paula said, "Come on, Muffin. We are going to fly. We're going to fish, too."

Muffin thought for a minute. He wasn't sure this was something he wanted to do. Finally he said, "O.K. if Mama says I can."

"Go ahead, Muffin, and have fun," Mama said.

Muffin went with Paul and Paula to fish and fly. He found that Paula was just as much fun as Paul, even if she WAS a girl. Muffin told Mama Puffin when they were flying home, "I like friends. I like playing with them and sharing with them, too. I KNEW something good was going to happen today!"



Muffin Catches A Cold

When Muffin awoke one morning the crown of his head hurt. His throat was hot and his feathers felt like they were moving. He looked to see if the wind was blowing—but there was no wind.

"What is wrong?" said Muffin. "I had better call Mama."

Mama Puffin came and said, "Muffin, open your mouth and stick out your tongue. Say A-A-H!"

Muffin could only croak weakly.

"Why, it's plain to see," said Mama, "you have the sniffles and the snuffles. You must rest in your nest."

Muffin stayed in the nest all morning. In the afternoon Mama took him to the seashore. He rested half in the shade beneath a bayberry bush and half in the sun.

Muffin saw his friend, the squirrel. Mr. Squirrel had a long, bushy tail and strong hind legs. He was busy storing up nuts and seeds for the winter.

Muffin could only croak as the squirrel passed by. "He doesn't know me," thought Muffin.

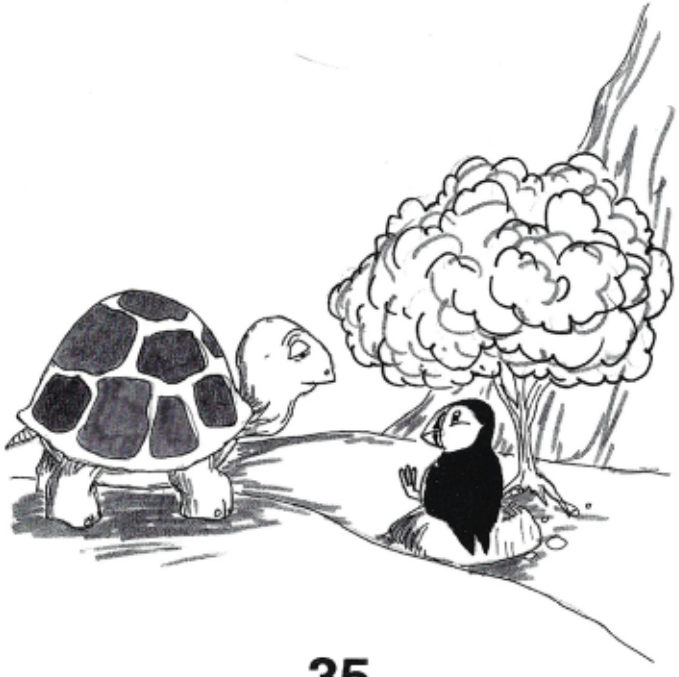
Next his friend, Mrs. Turtle, came by. When Muffin croaked, "Hello," she tucked her head, arms, legs, and tail inside her shell.

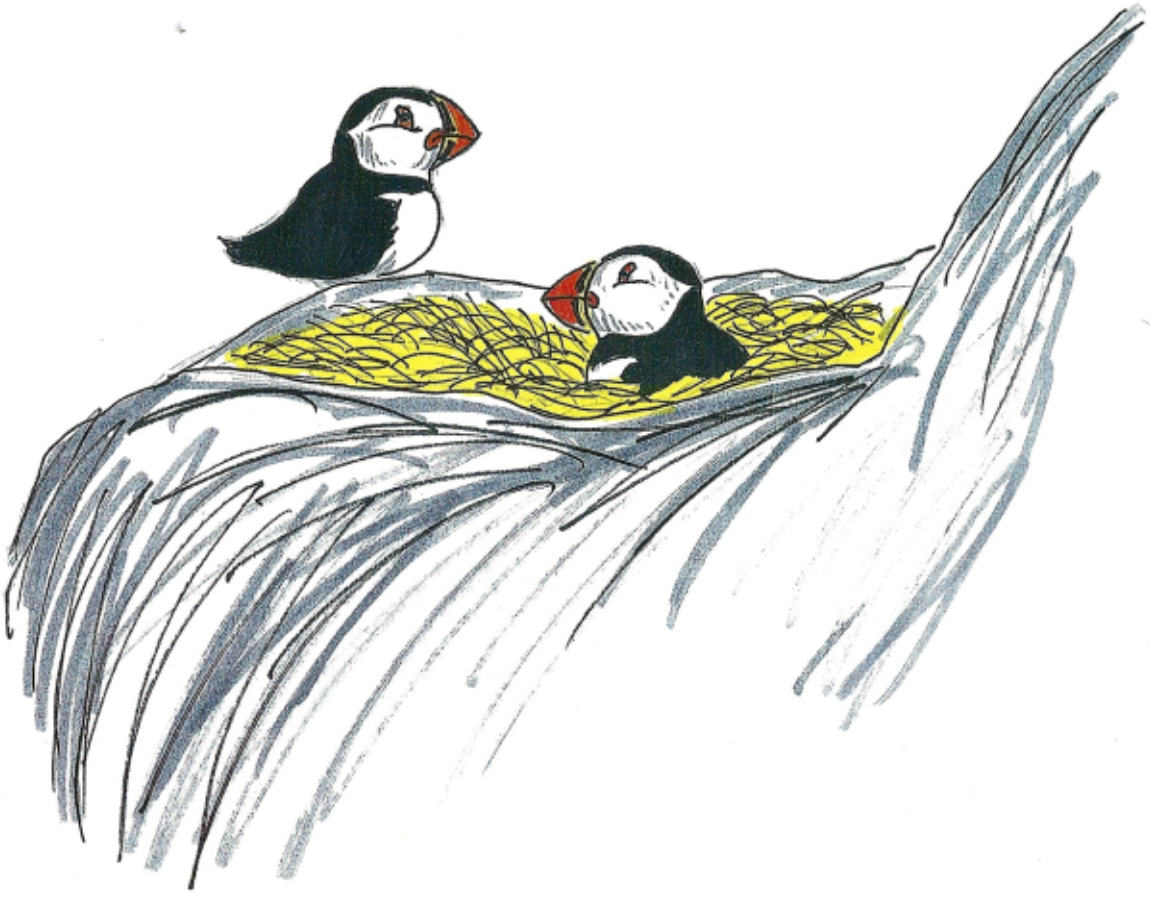
Muffin was sad. No one knew him. He fell asleep in the warm sun.

He awoke when Mr. Squirrel's tail brushed against his feathers. There stood Mrs. Turtle, with her head, arms, legs, and tail all back out of her shell.

They both chimed, "We did not know your croaky voice. We came back because we remembered your beautiful feathers. You simply have the sniffles and the snuffles. You will feel better tomorrow."

Muffin ruffled his beautiful feathers to show them both how happy he was.





Muffin Learns A Lesson

Hey, Muffin! Come on, Muffin!", Paul called. Muffin hurried out of his nice warm burrow.

Paul said, "I am going to teach you how to fish today."

Muffin looked down towards the sea. Then he looked up at the sky. He looked back at his burrow. He looked again at the sea.

"What's the matter, Muffin, are you afraid?" Paul asked.

"No!" said Muffin, "but my Mama told me that she and Papa were going to teach me. I think I'd better wait for them."

"Scaredy-Cat, Scaredy-Cat!" teased Paul.

"I am not," Muffin yelled.

"Are too!" said Paul. "What could happen if you went with me? We're friends and friends are supposed to share and have fun."

Muffin was faced with a real problem. "Oh dear, what shall I do?" He walked around and around, thinking and thinking. "Shall I mind my Mama or shall I go with my friend?"

"Hurry up," yelled Paul. "The tide will go out and we'll miss the best fishing."

"If I go with my friend, I can surprise Mama and Papa by learning something all by myself," Muffin thought. "Or I could get in BIG trouble by disobeying!"

"But," he thought, "I am growing and getting bigger every day, so maybe I will go with Paul."

As Muffin started to get ready to fly out over the sea, he remembered Papa had told him, "You are a very special bird."

"If I AM special," Muffin thought, "then I must ACT special. I should do what I think is right, not what someone else wants me to do. Not even if he's my friend. If it's wrong for me then I should say, "NO!"

So Muffin told Paul, "No, thanks, Paul. I'll go fishing with you some day, but only after Mama and Papa have taught me how."

"Are we still friends?" asked Paul.

"Sure we are," said Muffin.

Muffin had a deep warm feeling inside. He HAD learned something all by himself. He had learned that by doing right he had kept out of trouble and still kept his friend.

Canada
Presque Isle
Canada
Houlton
MAINE
Campobello Island
Bangor
New Hampshire
Machias Seal Rock
Augusta
Bar Harbor
Matinicus Rock
Eastern Egg Rock
Atlantic Ocean
Portland

THE ATLANTIC PUFFIN

"I am the Atlantic Puffin. My nesting grounds are the Russian Islands, Scandinavia, the British Isles, Greenland, Iceland, Labrador, Newfoundland and Maine. In the United States, I am unique to the State of Maine, for this is as far south as I come.

In Maine I live on the small and treeless outer islands at Machias Seal Rock, Matinicus Rock, and Eastern Egg Rock in Muscongus Bay. The islands have grass, herbs, ragweed, and goldenrod with thickets of bayberry and red raspberry bushes.

I am a comical-looking bird. I may be anywhere from 6 1/2 to 19 inches. I have a short neck and a chunky figure like a football. I waddle and jump from rock to rock on short orange legs set far back on my body.

I can make deep purring and croaking sounds with my voice. I am black and white with a bright orange bill shaped like a triangle with yellow stripes."

* * *

Puffins hatch their young in colonies in mid-June. Their nests are on bare ledges or in burrows or crevices lined with grass. The female lays one or two eggs that are incubated by the female or by both parents. The incubation period is 40 to 43 days.

Puffin babies stay in the nest 40 days. After that their parents abandon the nest and fly far out to sea. When the young become hungry enough they follow.

Puffins winter far out to sea and cannot fly for a while because they shed their feathers. When they are able to fly, they return to their original nesting area.

Both parents feed the young. They carry small fish neatly stowed in their big beaks back to the nest, alternating fish heads and tails.

When swimming underwater, they are able to catch one fish on one side of the bill and another on the other side. They are good divers and swimmers. They fly strongly with a rapid wing beat once in the air.

Other names by which puffins are known include:

Clown of the sea

Common puffin

Sea parrot

The Charlie Chaplin of Birdland

Steele

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